The fact that historiography, a discipline which orders temporal tiers, reflects upon time as a historical phenomenon and the experiences of acceleration and deceleration, is neither surprising nor new. Nevertheless, the last decade has seen a newly kindled interest in the history of time itself.\textsuperscript{1} This increasing attention is rooted, first, in the faded explanatory power of both the Western liberal and Marxist narrative of progress and the correspondent modernisation theories.\textsuperscript{2} François Hartog’s hypothesis that the 1980s saw the waning of the futural order of time and the rise of a new, presentist regime of historicity – i.e., an absolute orientation towards the present – has accordingly received much attention.\textsuperscript{3} The heightened interest in time stems, second, from the growing challenge to the dominant Euro-Atlantic time regimes, due not least to intensified encounters with alternative, non-Western temporalities.\textsuperscript{4} A third, yet categorically different, cause of the intensified historiographical reflection on time is the rapidly growing interest in the work of the late Reinhart Koselleck, his «theory of historical times», and his metahistorical categories «space of experience» and «horizon of expectation».\textsuperscript{5}

The transformation of temporality that first drew the attention of philosophers and sociologists – which they have variously described as a shrinking of the present (Lübbe), flexibility (Sennett), acceleration (Rosa), polar inertia (Virilio) or the dawn-
Revolution and Eternity

Theorizing a timeless time (Castells) – has begun to define the leading interests of historians. Venturing beyond the research on collective memory that had its heyday in the 1990s, a number of monographs, anthologies and conferences is now looking closer at a variety of «futures past», at the historical evolution of the experience of time, the revolutionary perception of time and the political formation of national, colonial and global regimes of time, and the attempts to achieve synchrony. Yet research on time has often been exclusively theoretical and philosophical, pondering only the general foundations of historiography. Actual case studies of temporalities, of how they were constructed, experienced and practiced, remain comparatively seldom, as for example in the case of the Soviet Union.

In this special issue, we aim to tackle this task by relating and comparing the concepts and politics of time primarily of Italian Fascism, but also of Nazism and of a further «major variant of fascism», i.e. the Romanian Legion of the Archangel Michael. This introduction will emphasize the «family resemblances» between Italian Fascism and Nazism with regard to temporality. Accordingly, we will not be focusing primarily on the many differences between these two fascisms. While we believe that fascism is a phenomenon that eludes static and thus essentialist codification, we deem it necessary to at least circumscribe it: we grasp fascism as a modern ideology and political praxis that combines techniques of violence with societal processes of acquiescence and subject formation. A nationalist and racist totalitarian intention to shape the life of one’s «own» people in order to improve it and «them», create a stable community and thus overcome the fundamental fractures underlying modernity is complemented with murderous modes of exclusion.

When attempting to systematize the fascist politics of time, or chronopolitics, we must first determine fascism’s relationship to past, present and future as well
as the specific order that fascism strove to establish between these three dimensions. Second, it is essential to place the fascist politics of time within a context that extends back at least to the early pivotal years of high modernism, the 1880s and 1890s. It was during this long turn of the century that the «temporalised» patterns of perception and thought that helped to constitute fascist conceptions of time became established. These included dynamic notions such as the belief in progress, the cult of speed and movement or the topos of neurasthenia on the one hand, and ideas such as presentism, anti-historicism and a mythic longing for deceleration on the other. While the latter, allegedly counterrevolutionary and restorative concepts are frequently associated with fascism – take, for example, the emphasis on Nazi agrarian romanticism or Fascism's ruralism – scholars have often underestimated its revolutionary drive. We seek not only to scrutinise the dynamism of fascism, but also to examine the close nexus between its futural momentum and its quest to unearth a buried and endangered eternal entity and corresponding values.

1. From the Belief in Progress to the Faith in the Malleability of Society

Associating fascism with the belief in progress would undoubtedly fall too short. Rather, the nineteenth century liberal, optimistic view of progress constituted the backdrop against which the characteristics of fascist chronopolitics began to take shape: The search for an alternative to the liberal and Marxist narratives of progress as well as the historicist and materialist mind-set was the starting point for the specifically fascist order of time.

The mechanised carnage of the Great War, revolutionary upheavals and economic instability led to a transformation of progressive expectations and a shift in
the optimistic orientation towards the future. Overall, political thought became further «futurised»: The anticipation of revolution, the subsequent emergence of an alternative society and the creation of the «new man» had gained a foothold in all political camps. As Rüdiger Graf has demonstrated, the basic mind-set of the interwar period was not generalised pessimism, but rather optimism regarding the malleability of society. For the radical right as well as the left, the state of affairs after the Great War was understood as an «open situation» in which a decision was «pending, but had not yet been made.» The «new nationalists» who had emerged from the war believed that the downfall of the nation was imminent. Yet to them, this looming demise was also the precondition for its renewed rise, at least if the proper decisions and actions were taken.

The fascists’ opportunity to implement their alternative model of the future arose from the failure of the old liberal system in Italy, the Weimar coalition in Germany and the right-wing nationalist organisations. The pessimistic perception of the present was thus a precondition of fascist success, which was founded not least on the promise of a brighter future for the respective Volksgenossen. In this mind-set, the erstwhile belief in progress mutated into an actionist belief in the possibility of creating and engineering a new society once the old one had been thoroughly dismantled. What the Italian writer and politician Filippo Tommaso Marinetti had pronounced as early as 1909 applied even more after the Great War: «The time is right. Man is becoming mythical once again! The bowels of the earth are vomiting up the monsters of speed. The old iron is searching for the sudden fire. [...] Never has the present seemed so divorced from the genetic chain of the past as now, its own son and great creator of future powers.» As a result of the war, the present seemed to have been liberated from the «genetic chain of the past». Not only had the gap between experience and expectation grown larger because of it, but the rift seemed
so deep that «even the completely inconceivable could become reality, and henceforth absolutely nothing could be ruled out any longer».17

Before beginning to shape the future, the fascists deemed it necessary to complete the destructive process unleashed by the war. The deadly praxis of the fascists – be it the political murders committed by the squadre or the SA during the initial movement stage or the mass killing of the Jews and other minorities while in power – should also be seen as an attempt to violently clear away the debris of an adverse past and to create a tabula rasa or, as Walter Benjamin called it, a «drawing board», on which the new future could be designed and built.18 Not just intellectuals and the artistic avant-garde, but also social engineers envisioned a future freed of the burdens of the past – regardless of the consequences.19

These social engineers, who had established themselves in the interwar period in the most diverse arenas of society, were united by both a forward-looking optimism of feasibility and a delusional and radical doctrine of order. A group of influential experts emerged in social medicine, bioscience, «race hygiene», social welfare, demography, urban planning, scientific management, agricultural science, economics and statistics. In the course of the scientisation of politics, they arrived at increasingly radical visions of a society planned and governed by technocrats. In the spirit of objectivity, their social programs, health policies and settlement plans were tied to measures of annihilation. The new order rested on a society homogenised, purified and standardised by social technologists, which required a «gardener state» that did not shy away from violent measures of exclusion to prevent the feared degeneration and contribute to the making of a better future.20

The horrors of the «human slaughterhouse» of the Great War and the actualisation of the hitherto unimaginable had established an attitude among these social engineers that became known as «cool conduct».21 This demeanour was characterised by sober absoluteness, distance and a fundamental penchant for violence. The

war had also expanded the range of instruments available to subject society to actual rationalisation and planning measures. Furthermore, it had created precisely that kind of «field of experimentation» in which the future could be actively shaped according to utopian visions. The matter-of-fact term «planning» became «the key concept for achieving such goals: systematically, step-by-step and continuously with the aim of fulfilling, in the near or at least «foreseeable» future, the far-reaching expectations associated with these measures.» The soberness of this term and the distance from which interventions were conducted disguised the demiurgic dimension inherent in planning as an «anticipation of the future».

2. Machine Men and the Cult of Speed

One of the most obvious fields in which these social technologies were implemented during the interwar years was the workplace, both the shop floor and the office. A multitude of new social technologies was marshalled to rationalise the bodies and routines of the industrial workforce and the rapidly rising number of clerks and secretaries. The «new magic of technology» combined with psycho-technological selection processes meant to mechanise, standardise and accelerate the body and thus render it more efficient.

As a result, the interwar years saw the ubiquitous fusion of body and machine. Not just workers but also soldiers and athletes were regarded as «machine men», whose organic bodies were fused with technology to be led in columns towards mechanical synchronisation. These *hominis novi* embodied the complete opposite of fin-de-siècle fears of decadence, effeminacy and neurasthenia. In the sporting trends of the 1920s – motor racing and stunt flying in particular – recklessness, bravado and danger joined forces with self-control, composure and detachment. Thus, the habitus of cool and accelerated conduct entered the everyday life of the masses not just through the implementation of social technologies, but also via the celebration of the new sporting gods. The «revived bionic bodies of fascist futurism» not only articulated the «human body’s metallic dream»; it also enabled fascism to demand and heroise «superhuman physical exploits».

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24 S. Reichardt, «Gewalt, Körper, Politik. Paradoxi...
It was no accident that race car drivers, alongside airplane pilots, best incorporated this combination of speed and composure. In Nazism, as in Italian Fascism, they gained even more popularity. The most famous race car driver of the time, three-time European champion Rudolf Caracciola, who drove a Mercedes Silver Arrow (Silberpfeil), was a prominent part of «Hitler’s racing battles». Caracciola, who set many speed records on the newly completed autobahn and the «autodromes», was extremely popular not only in Germany, but also in Italy, where he was celebrated for his Neapolitan heritage as well as his stint at Alfa Romeo. People admired what the specialist journal Das Auto called the «death-defying bravado» of the drivers, with their maximum speeds of up to 400km/h (240mph), average round speeds of up to 250km/h (150mph) and frequent fatal accidents. The strong nerves and imperturbable attitude of drivers like Carraciola, Manfred von Brauchitsch, Hans Stuck, Hans Lang, Georg «Schorsch» Meier and the daredevil «blond Bernd», SS Hauptssturmführer Bernd Rosemeyer, who was killed during a race in 1938, were held in high regard. As Victor Klemperer noted in his diary, the press reports about Rosemeyer marked the «ideal of the Nazi style – Goebbels learned here, and one learned from him – this is the uniform, the attitude of the Third Reich».

Italy’s first autostrada had already been built in 1924, and the country boasted its own racing champions, Tazio Nuvolari and Achille Varzi, who drove the spectacularly fast single-seater Grand Prix cars built by Bugatti, Alfa Romeo and Maserati. Benito Mussolini frequently had his picture taken behind both the pilot stick of a plane and the wheel of a race car. Prestigious projects such as the twenty-kilometre autostrada from Rome to Ostia, which connected the city, sea, harbour and airport in 1928, symbolised the potential and dynamism of Fascist Italy.

The German KdF Volkswagen and the Fiat people’s car Balilla promised to make cars and the acceleration of individual transportation available to everyone. Even if the pledge to motorise the nation (Volksmotorisierung) was a dream never realised, the number of cars in Germany more than doubled from 1.5 million in 1933 to 3.7 million in 1939. Whereas Italy had only 49,000 motor vehicles on its streets...
in 1920, in 1940 there were roughly 360,000. FIAT started to produce the model 508 (Balilla) in 1930 and in 1936 the famous model 500 («topolino»). The Turin car company produced 22,000 cars in 1932 and 38,000 in 1935. But many of these expensive cars were exported to foreign countries. Besides the differences in numbers, car driving was an activity for the bourgeoisie in both countries. Mass motorisation did not begin until the 1950s.34

When it came to rail traffic, the promise of accelerated mobility was partially kept. Trains on the railway line from Berlin to Cologne, for instance, attained a new maximum speed of 160km/h (96mph). In June 1933 «lightning-speed air traffic» was introduced with the high-speed airplane, the Heinkel He 70, which reduced the flying time between Berlin and Hamburg to just 50 minutes.35

Both Italian and German fascists extensively developed and used radio communication – whose up to date nature (aktuelle Zeitnähe) Goebbels greatly praised – in order to construct a virtual Volksgemeinschaft of simultaneity.36 As Ruth Ben-Ghiat’s article on Italian empire cinema shows, the new means of communication per se implied other and new temporalities, which the regimes used for their own ends. Future research will have to clarify the nexus between the technological acceleration that took place during the fascist reign (from transportation to communication systems), the rate of social change and the perception of a quicker pace of life. Can we observe a societal and individual devaluation of experience, the so called «shrinking of the present», and which social groups faced actual time pressures?

While speed was a signature, if not an obsessive fascination of the times in nearly every industrialised country in Europe as well as in the United States, no one propagated the cult of speed more vociferously than the Italian Futurists. This artistic avant-garde was characterised by a veneration of the new pace of life, technology, violence and a longing for a «cathartic power» that would wipe away the «passatism» and the «antiquarians». Marinetti glorified the ecstatic speed of the present and...
repeatedly associated its technological achievements with the machinery of war. War was the «cleansing morality», Marinetti wrote when describing «dynamic and aggressive Futurism» in 1915: «Technologically induced destruction» had become the necessary «condition for the rise of a new order» that artists, like social experts, were striving to create. The cult of violence, acceleration and machines was oriented exclusively towards the future and driven by an anti-historicist attitude that made the absolute destruction of the past the precondition for a different future.

3. Fascist Dromocracy, Restless Revolutionaries and Breathless Standstill

While we cannot describe all Italian Futurists as fascists, Fascism most certainly adopted Futurist concepts. The common ground shared by Futurists and Fascists ranged from vitalist heroism and the aesthetisation of violence and danger (vivere pericolosamente) to an enthralment with wars of imperial ambition and the idea of the total mobilisation of the Italian nation. The cult of speed and the associated revolutionary spirit of a new beginning particularly united Futurists and fascists. They combined destructive acceleration and regenerative violence with power in order to establish the future greatness of the nation. The triangle of velocity, violence and power was embedded in the aforementioned understanding of the present as a crisis: it was high time to act to avert the looming disaster, which is why one should and would not shy away from violence. Adopting a stance of brutal decisiveness, the fascists radicalised the gestures of an at-once future-oriented and matter-of-factly objective «cult of feasibility». They cherished violence as a force of change not only for its relentlessness, but also for its accelerating power. Once again, it was World War I that convinced the fascists of the power of violence to effect change. Speed and terror had already merged at the beginning of the fascist movements when the SA troops learned from the Italian squadristi to use trucks as fast and efficient combat and propaganda vehicles. Trucks enabled the squadristi and the SA to concentrate their fighting power for their «punishment expeditions», radically enlarging the radius of their acts of terror and further increasing their dynamism.

The fascist "dictatorships of acceleration" (Lutz Raphael)\textsuperscript{41} further radicalised this attitude and out of the wish to overcome the immobility of the trench warfare and a more fundamental revolutionary longing for a new order. The astute observer Victor Klemperer has stressed the degree to which dynamism and movement were fundamental to the very nature of Nazi linguistic politics:

It had been explained in so many texts and articles, in so many different expressions and contexts, that trench warfare was a professional error, a weakness, indeed even a sin to which the army of the Third Reich would never succumb [...], because Bewegung was the quintessence, the unique quality, the very lifeblood of National Socialism [...] «Sturm [storm]» is, as it were, its first and last word: at the beginning there is the training with the SA, the Storm Troopers, and at the end the Volkssturm [...]. The SS has its cavalry storm, the army has its storm troops and storm artillery, the rabble-rousing anti-Jewish newspaper was called the Stürmer. [...] «Schlagartige Aktionen [abrupt actions]» are the SA's first acts of heroism, and Goebbels' newspaper is called the Angriff[attack]. The war must be a Blitzkrieg, and all kinds of sporting expressions provide fodder for the LTI in general.\textsuperscript{42}

Born out of strategic necessity and reduced to a mere propagandistic slogan at the latest after the initial deceptive successes of the Operation Barbarossa, the Blitzkrieg nonetheless epitomised the target speed of all action.\textsuperscript{43} The Italian General Giulio Douhet had already introduced the term guerra fulminante, and played an important role in developing revolutionary ideas about air power that influenced other military thinkers during the 1920s and 1930s. He maintained that a powerful air force could deliver a decisive blow to an opponent at the beginning of a war by concentrating its strength on destroying those points vital to the enemy.\textsuperscript{44} Not only were the fascists «dromocrats of the total war» (Paul Virilio)\textsuperscript{45} who turned movement and speed into the basic principles of warfare, they also transferred these maxims to politics. They saw themselves as restless revolutionaries forever under the gun, and set «extremely short deadlines for their domestic and foreign policy goals».\textsuperscript{46} The fascist disciples of speed paired their uncompromising and brutal «will to feasibility» with acceleration and restlessness. At the same time, they elevated tempo to a criterion for the

\textsuperscript{42} V. Klemperer, The Language of the Third Reich. LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii. A Philologist's Notebook, M. Brady (Transl.), London 2006, 210–211.
\textsuperscript{45} P. Virilio, Speed and Politics, Los Angeles, CA 2006, 48.
\textsuperscript{46} Raphael, Imperiale Gewalt 228.
efficiency of political action and painted themselves as revolutionaries of action. That is precisely how Joseph Goebbels described the frenetic speed of the Nazi movement in 1932: «Tempo! Tempo! That was the motto of our work. [...] In this raging fury of a battle between good and evil there was no mercy.»

On 1 January 1932 he noted in his diary: «One can't imagine life anymore [...] without a wild and exciting tempo.» Even some KPD-members were impressed when they justified their changeover: «Adolf does it faster.» During the first half of 1933, Goebbels ranted endlessly about the «revolution». For him, revolution was an attitude aimed at the cosiness and snugness of the bourgeoisie, a moral stance against the bargain- ing, compromise and palter of the Jews and a mind-set closely bound to destruction, acceleration, youth and manliness.

For Goebbels, the national socialist «revolution» was a «total» one: «It is the essence of every true revolution to go the whole hog. We don't know any compromises.» Fascist revolutions were total and absolute, clinical and sober, gemeinschaftbildend and violent. Yet when Hitler decided to end the revolutionary period, Goebbels immediately stopped his campaign and opportunistically noted in his diary on 12 July 1933: «Frick decree: «Revolution is at its end.»» Despite his pragmatism and up to the very end of the regime, the chief of propaganda always celebrated the exhilarating feeling of being carried away. In a diary entry from spring 1941, he wrote: «The whole day a marvellous tempo»; «now the breathless pace of life on the offensive is resuming», or, in the anti-British victory rush, «I spent the whole day in a feverish state of happiness.» As the Nazi legal scholar Herbert Krüger wrote in his 1935 study Führer und Führung, this furious restlessness of the «fighting movement» was «a goal unto itself». «Movement», he also noted, «is the nature, the form and the order of the new life», which was allegedly an «inner attitude [...] of not wishing to come to rest, and not allowing it».56

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47 J. Goebbels, Das erwachende Berlin, Munich 1934, 17.


49 Meschnig, Der Wille zur Bewegung, 294.


51 Ibid., 131.


55 A. Hitler, Mein Kampf, 42nd ed. Munich 1936, 418.

56 H. Krüger, Führer und Führung, Breslau 1935, 40–41. 43. 46–47.
During the 1932 election campaign, Hitler already orchestrated this impression of restlessness by using an airplane for his public appearances. This enabled him to appear in 53 towns and cities while profiting from the airplane’s aura of dynamic modernity. His relentless commitment to Germany was celebrated in poems such as this one by Herybert Menzel: «Occasionally at night, the sound of motors / High above us, you, Führer, without rest.» The twelve years of Nazi rule seem exceptionally condensed, apparent testimony to a constant increase in the movement leadership’s tirelessness and restlessness. This might tempt us to introduce the concept of the regime’s «cumulative acceleration» alongside its «cumulative radicalisation.» On the one hand, this cumulative acceleration was rooted in Hitler’s «end-time thinking» or his «concrete eschatology», in the light of which «everything currently happening became a struggle in the face of the end». On the other hand, it was the product of the structure of the regime itself, which constantly produced new pressures to act and new states of emergency which called for a further flight forward.

At the very beginning of his regime, on 10 February 1933, Hitler announced in his speech at the Berlin Sportpalast, which was broadcasted on radio, that the work of destruction wrought by the «November criminals» had to be eradicated. Hitler proposed an ambitious rebuilding «timetable» to counteract their «work of subversion»:

[B]ecause we perceive our highest goal to be the preservation of our Volk, enabling it to undertake its own struggle for existence, we must eliminate the causes of decadence and thus bring about the reconciliation of the German classes. A goal that cannot be achieved in six weeks or four months if others have been labouring at this disintegration for seventy years. [...] For fourteen years, the parties of decay, of the November revolution, have seduced and abused the German people. For fourteen years they have wreaked destruction, have undermined and disintegrated. Considering this, it is not presumptuous of me to stand before the nation today and plead of it: German Volk, give us four years’ time and then pass judgment upon us.

«Give us four years’ time» would become a familiar expression, which also came to be used ironically. Nevertheless, the next four-year deadline was set before the first...
had expired. Hitler’s memorandum for a four-year plan of August/September 1936 not only expressed his will to conduct an economically ruthless armaments policy; it also revealed the apocalyptic time horizon of his thinking:

Since the outbreak of the French Revolution, the world has been moving with ever increasing speed towards a new conflict, whose most extreme solution is called Bolshevism […]. It is not the aim of this memorandum to prophesy the time when the untenable situation in Europe will become an open crisis. I only want, in these lines, to set down my conviction that this crisis cannot and will not fail to arrive and that it is Germany’s duty to secure her own existence by every means in face of this catastrophe, and to protect herself against it; […] For a victory of Bolshevism over Germany would not lead to a Versailles Treaty, but to the final destruction, indeed to the annihilation of the German people.62

Hitler used this nightmare scenario as a justification for the regime’s cumulative acceleration and radicalisation: «The extent and pace of the military analysis of our resources cannot be made too large or too rapid! […] If we do not succeed in developing the German Wehrmacht within the shortest possible time into the first army in the world, in training, in the raising of units, in armaments, and, above all, in spiritual education as well, Germany will be lost!» The economic mobilisation had to occur «at the same tempo, with the same determination, and, if need be, with the same ruthlessness as well» in order for the Wehrmacht to be ready for action within four years’ time and for the economy to be able to sustain war within the same period.63

Together with his hubris, Hitler’s sense that time was running out and his need to fulfil his hypertrophic and monstrous goals within his lifetime contributed to an unprecedented pressure to act and an ominous acceleration of governance.64 The risky nature of many decisions and actions created a structural imperative for action and even increased the willingness of local decision makers to «work towards the Führer».65 The rivalry between the many diverging executive bodies made for further urgency and speed. The image that Götz Aly has conjured up of Hitler seems to apply to the entire regime: «Hitler was like an amateur tightrope walker who can maintain his balance only by taking ever faster steps – and who inevitably falls from the wire. Hitler’s political and military decisions are best interpreted in the light of his motivation at the moment, despite all his thundering rhetoric about the future.»66 Yet controlling the violence and the speed of the fascist war machinery

64 For more on this, see Kershaw, Hitler, 63.
66 Aly, Hitler’s Beneficiaries, 321.
and «community of action» (Tatgemeinschaft) proved to be the true challenge. Accordingly, the fascists relied on the mode and style of matter-of-fact, cool objectivity that they were able to consolidate in the course of the regime, although only in a precarious form.

The Italian Fascists did not develop quite such a downward spiralling dynamic. The power of the old conservative elites on whom Mussolini depended for cooperation was too great for this to occur, while the power of the radical Fascists, the Ras and their squadre, was too small. Mussolini’s tightrope act consisted of finding a balance between stabilising the regime with the help of the traditional elites and radicalising it in response to pressures from his party. Nevertheless, it was the same will to revolution, to new beginnings and further acceleration, to a destruction of the old and decadent and the construction of a different future that characterised their rhetoric.

Like the Nazis, the Italian Fascists defined themselves as a «fighting movement», or, in Mussolini’s words, an «anti-party, without statutes, without rules». In March 1921, Mussolini stated: «Fascism is not a church. It is more like a training ground. It is not a party. It is a movement.»

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On the second anniversary of the founding of the fasci di combattimento on 23 March 1921, Mussolini declared in the Popolo d’Italia: «We hardly have time to commemorate this event. The battle is raging everywhere. The daily reports are red from the blood that has been spilled. We are also not suited to be orators. We look ahead and march forward – that is our way. We are young; no weight of history is pulling us down. The past cannot be a burden holding us back, for the dynamic, eventful present drives us towards the future.»

If they had not already been before, the Italian Fascists were driven towards the future following the pact with Nazi Germany and the ensuing competition for fame and war booty. The shift in international relations brought about by the rise of Nazi Germany meant that time was running out for the realisation of overambitious goals. It was time to implement the new Fascist man’s will to go to war. From now on, Mussolini rushed his troops, which were completely unprepared for war, from one military adventure to the next. Henceforth, Italian Fascism faced what Robert Paxton has described as a choice between radicalisation and entropy.

The radicalisation of Italian Fascism, which culminated in the founding of the Republic of Salò in September 1943, had already started with the Second Italo-Abys-
Sinian War in 1935. In Ethiopia, the Fascist regime not only sought revenge for the inglorious defeat of Adua in 1896, but also strove to reignite the revolutionary dynamics of its early years with the aid of a brutal war of extermination. After nearly thirteen years in power, the Fascists were in danger of becoming just as comfortable as the old liberal elites they despised so much. The violence perpetrated in the new empire served as the impetus for a so-called «cultural revolution» and a «totalitarian turn» at home. In this respect, the war served as a breeding ground for the romani moderni, since it was intended to revive the long-lost virtues of ancient Rome and help shake off the ignominious past still lingering in Italians. «We must clear away and destroy these sediments that have been deposited on the character and mentality of the Italians in the course of those horrible centuries of political, military and moral decadence, from 1600 to the rise of Napoleon. This is a strenuous effort. The Risorgimento was only the beginning, as it was the act of minorities who were far too weak; the Great War, on the other hand, was educational at the deepest level. It is necessary to continue the renewal of the character of the Italians day by day.»

The task of renewal resumed with the escalation of the violence in Abyssinia and the wars that followed. According to the futurist writer Mario Carli, this was necessary to bring forth the «modern barbarian, [...] in other words, the entirely future-oriented modern man». In his 1921 article «Passato e Avvenire» (Past and Future), Mussolini declared that this orientation towards the future rested upon «our myth» of Rome. For the Fascists, Rome was both «a starting and reference point», but, as the fascist minister of Education Giuseppe Bottai stated, they aimed at a «renovation, a revolution of the idea of Rome», not at a «restauration».

How was this paradox of revolution and eternity, of accelerating and halting time, resolved? Overall, the fascist orientation towards an alternative future remained oddly abstract. Faith, action, combat and the deed replaced concrete ideas of how, and to what end, the future was actually being shaped. The overwrought speed of governance, the obsession with quick decision-making, the constant impro...
visation owing to the self-imposed and (during the war) actual pressure to act, the illusion that it was possible to create a new human being and society, were all expressions of a specifically fascist restlessness. The fact that the fascists saw themselves as the vanguard of societal change initiated a «velocity» that put the regime under permanent stress.75

Leading fascists continued to invoke the tightly set timeframe for realising utopian tasks to an almost absurd degree. The high speed of action and the resulting apparent necessity to mobilise the last reserves of energy contrasted strikingly with the eschatological utopia of a «Thousand-Year Reich», with the fascists’ millenarian affinity for fate.76 It makes sense to speak of a breathless standstill to describe the paradoxical time horizon the fascists alluded to.77 The idea here was to accelerate time until it stopped. The first Futurist manifesto states: «We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.»78 By speeding up profane time via revolution, the fascists strove to (re)enter the sacred, mythical and thus apparently motionless, halted time of the eternal nation or Volk.

4. History Is Made – Fascist Anti-historicism

When analysing the relationship between fascism and time, it is imperative that we briefly discuss the fascist concept of history.79 Although we should assume the same degree of «pluralism» in the fascist idea of history as in fascist ideology more generally, there is a common denominator: a voluntarist, anti-historicist and monumentalist understanding of history. As Claudio Fogu’s article on the fascist stylisation of time elucidates, the barb that Mussolini launched at Benedetto Croce, and thus at liberalism as such, in 1929 was that Fascism does not write history; it makes it. The Duce thereby implied that, unlike the dusty bygone liberalism that was history, Fascism was a virile agent and shaper of history. As was often the case, Hitler trumped Mussolini in this regard when, in a speech he gave in Detmold on 4 January 1933, he noted: «In the end, it makes no difference what percentage of the German Volk makes history. The only important thing is that we are the last ones to make history in Germany!»80 History may have been interpreted as a «force of destiny», but one could still shape history through an act of will. The past became a malleable mate-

77 Whereas Paul Virilio’s French term «inertie polaire» and the English translation «polar inertia» are not quite accurate, the fascist time horizon is best described by the German translation «rasender Stillstand» or «breathless standstill». As this oxymoron invokes both the notion of enormous speed, the commensurate frenzied state of mind and the antithetical standstill it seems best suited to illustrate the paradox underlying fascist temporality.
78 Marinetti, «Fondazione e Manifesto», 11.
79 For more on Italian fascism and for further literature, see C. Fogu, The Historic Imaginary. Politics of History in Fascist Italy, Toronto 2003.
80 Speech by Hitler in Detmold on 4 January 1933. In: Domarus, The Essential Hitler, 145.
Wolfgang Hardtwig has neatly summarised this last point: «By abandoning the idea of development, it became possible to refer to the stock of tradition arbitrarily, from the ancient primitive cultures to the Fredericks, from either the Hohenstaufen or Hohenzollern dynasty, and to declare them the foundations of a grand future.»82 This was one of the key underpinnings of fascist anti-historicism.

The «anti-historicist revolution» unleashed by the fascists was directed against historicist thinking as such. The fascists rejected the historical conditionality of existence and replaced this knowledge with the belief in an ahistorical absolute, namely the nation or Volk.83 The flow of emerging and dissolving values had to be halted and an era of eternal duration ushered in (once again). Furthermore, fascist anti-historicism strove to eliminate certain pasts while reconnecting with others as Joshua Arthurs’ article on the Italian fascists’ excavatory intervention shows. The fascists tried to purge those pasts that they saw as the roots of the decay of the nation or the people, while overrating and glorifying those historical episodes and epochs that revealed the greatness of the nation or the people.

Whereas the Italian fascists regarded all of Italian history since the end of the (western) Roman Empire – with the exception of the Renaissance and the Risorgimento – as a phase of decay to be overcome, the Nazis saw particularly the «liberal» nineteenth century as an «epoch of decline».84 During that period, certain «corrosive» ideas such as individualism, liberalism, capitalism and Marxism had become dominant, weakening the German people and preventing it from continuing its «fight for life». In Hitler’s view, history could be reduced to such a «struggle for survival». That is why «all that was rotten, weak [and] sick» now had to be «split off», so that the healthy and eternal could resurface and shape the future.85 In an election speech of 24 February 1933 in Munich he announced: «We have to compensate for yesterday’s crimes! It is our task to ensure that the pages in German history that herald and report of our decay are torn up by us and that one day German youths can live to see the new Reich.»86 At the same time, the Germans were to refer to honour and revive those chapters of history in which the «eternal values and vir-


84 See Kroll, *Utopie als Ideologie*, 174.


86 Speech by Hitler in Munich from 24 February 1933 in: Domarus, *The Essential Hitler*, 215.
A passage from *Mein Kampf* tellingly reveals this monumentalist concept of history: «Any beneficial renovation of mankind will always have to resume building on the spot where the last good foundations end. It need not blush to utilise those truths that have already been established. For all human culture, as well as man himself, is only the result of one long line of development, where each generation has contributed but one stone to the building of the whole edifice. The meaning and purpose of revolutions cannot be to tear down the whole building but to take away what has not been well fitted into it or is unsuitable, and to rebuild the space freed in this way, after which the main construction of the building will occur.» Translation by the authors based on A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, London et al. 1939, 205.


90 For more on this, see J. Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy*, Ithaca, NY 2012; Gentile, *Il culto del litorio*.

Fascism borrowed its rhetorical style, its modes of organisation and living, and above all the multitude of symbols and rituals that fundamentally shaped its image from the cult of romanità. Romanità consistently served as an «invented tradition» (Hobsbawm) for Fascism itself and for the community it conceived. It could be used for legitimation purposes whenever needed – be it for the cult of the Duce, endeavours to achieve autarky, the imperial ambitions of the regime, the impending «anthropological revolution», or the totalitarian state to be established.93

The purpose of the cult of romanità, the attempt to breed a romano moderno, the topos of the empire or Reich as well as the cult of the Germanic and the medieval was not to induce a «counterrevolutionary» return to a status quo ante or a romanticised past, but to anchor the new beginning and the «new time». The renewal and rebirth of the buried, allegedly eternal was to be brought about by a very modernist break with the recent, seemingly ominous past. Once this renewal had been achieved, further breaches with the past would become unnecessary. In the eyes of the fascists, the «past» they were trying to recreate was not past, anyway; it had merely been tainted, covered up and disregarded by liberalism and Marxism. According to Giuseppe Bottai, Rome was not meant to work as «an idea crystallised in this or that traditional form», but as a «living and continuous» idea, «in time, according to our time, with our time».94 In order to escape the transcendental rootlessness caused by liberal and Marxist modernity’s historicist temporality and «return home» under the holy canopy of the nation or the Volk, it was now necessary to «reconnect forwards», as Moeller van den Bruck stated.95 The mythical modernity the fascists envisaged was not founded on a reactionary return to the past.96 On the contrary, the renewal of a solid foundation and eternal firmament was conceived of as a new beginning, as a fascist «new era». The eternal, which had appeared repeatedly in the past, was to be recreated once and for all.97 Following apocalyptic and chiliastic thought, the dawn of a «Thousand-Year Reich» would vanquish present misery and distress.98 The age of decline and the relativism of values would be followed by the advent of an eternal, unmoving time, where immutable values reigned, existence was imbued with meaning and the life of the nation or the Volk transcended death. The «Third Reich» was an «eternal morning»,99 that embraced a new beginning, novelty, youthfulness (giovinezza) and the future as well as the «eternal core» that had already been revealed in the past.

93 On the anthropological revolution, see, for example, Gentile, «L’uomo nuovo», 235–264.
94 Bottai, «Roma e fascismo», 152.
95 A. Moeller van den Bruck, Das Dritte Reich, 2nd ed., Berlin 1926, 236. On this, see: Griffin, Modernism and Fascism, 132, 177.
96 On this and the following, see Esposito, Mythische Moderne, 399–431.
99 Petersen, Die Sehnsucht nach dem Dritten Reich, 1.
By establishing this nexus between future-oriented dynamics and an eternity which obviously encompassed the past, fascism was able to fulfil not just the need for a new beginning and «revolution» but also the longing for rootedness. The narrative of rebirth and eternity with which fascism replaced the narrative of progress comprised both the prevailing obsession with movement and revolution and the omnipresent longing for deceleration. Fascism presented itself simultaneously as the origin of the break with centuries of decay and decadence and as the restorer of continuity and preserver of permanence. Accelerators and decelerators alike saw in fascism an echo of their longing to escape from meaningless, desacralised, profane (post-war) time and to cross the threshold into sacred time, a concept that Raul Carstocea’s article on Mircea Eliade’s entanglement with the Romanian Iron Guard examines more closely. The destruction of the past and the restoration of origins, the beginning of a new era and the thousand-year standstill of time, revolution and eternity, were thus united in fascism.

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